

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Reverence for life

Last month, the President of the United States addressed the United Nations and threatened to "totally destroy North Korea," a nation of 25 million people who live under a brutal dictatorship.

At times like these I reflect on a teacher from the past who preached the polar opposite, "reverence for life."

"Reverence for life" is the well-known philosophy conceived by Albert Schweitzer, the German-French humanitarian who founded and operated a hospital to provide free treatment for Africans in the jungles of Gabon, in west central Africa, from 1913 until his death in 1965.

One of the 20th century's most brilliant men, Schweitzer was a professor, theologian, philosopher, organist, and the author of scholarly books on theology and music, particularly the works of Bach and the construction and operation of historic pipe organs.

But he abjured a comfortable life in Europe to treat the sick in Africa, entering medical school at 30, earning his degree, and raising money through organ recitals to establish a hospital on the banks of the Ogooué River. He spent the rest of his life working in the jungle, returning to Europe only occasionally for fundraising and recuperation.

His life and writings are among the most noble in the millennia of civilization. Here's a sample:

"Late on the third day (while traveling up the Ogooué), at the very moment when at sunset we were making our way through a herd of hippopotamuses, there flashed upon my mind, unforeseen and unsought: **"Reverence for Life."**

"The iron door had yielded: The path in the thicket had become visible. Now I had found my way to the idea in which life-affirmation and ethics are contained side by side!

"Thus, to me, ethics is nothing else than reverence for life. Reverence for life affords me my funda-

mental principal of morality, namely, that good consists in maintaining, assisting and enhancing life, and that to destroy, to harm or to hinder life is evil.

"Affirmation of the world--that is, affirmation of the will-to-live which appears in phenomenal form all around me--is only possible for me in that I give myself out for other life.

"Without understanding the meaning of the world, I act from an inner necessity of my being so as to create values and to live ethically."



Commentary by
Tom Hylton

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"Anyone who has recognized that the idea of love is the spiritual beam of light, which reaches us from the infinite, ceases to demand from religion that it offer him complete knowledge of the supernatural."

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"It is this principle of love that we have tried to practice in ... West Africa.

"For example, when some poor moaning creature is brought to me with an inflamed appendix or a strangulated hernia, I lay my hand on his forehead and say to him: 'Don't be afraid! In an hour's time you shall be put to sleep, and when you wake you won't feel any more pain.'

"When the operation is finished, in the barely lighted dormitory, I watch for the sick man's awakening. Scarcely has he recovered consciousness when he stares about him and exclaims again and again: 'I've no more pain! I've no more pain!' His hand feels for mine and will not let it go.



Albert Schweitzer

...
"The African sun is shining through the coffee bushes into the dark shed, but we black and white sit side by side and feel that we experience the meaning of the words: 'And all ye are brethren'."

In a world brimming with hate and violence, and the media brimming with crime, drugs, and selfish behavior, it is comforting to look at the changing seasons and think of a man who understood what life is all about.